

Message Text

SECRET

PAGE 01 JIDDA 01784 071519Z
ACTION NODS-00

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 /001 W
-----005384 071521Z /53

O 071440Z MAR 78
FM AMEMBASSY JIDDA
TO AMCONSUL JERUSALEM NIACT IMMEDIATE
INFO SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 1315
AMEMBASSY AMMAN IMMEDIATE
AMEMBASSY CAIRO IMMEDIATE
AMEMBASSY DAMASCUS IMMEDIATE
AMEMBASSY TEL AVIV IMMEDIATE
USLO RIYADH IMMEDIATE

S E C R E T JIDDA 1784

EXDIS HANDLE AS NODIS

FOR ATHERTON

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: PGOV, XF, US
SUBJECT: ATHERTON VISIT

REF: JERUSALEM 656

1. WE HAVE JUST RECEIVED GENEVA 3522 INSORMING US
THAT PRINCE SAUD WOULD WELCOME OPPORTUNITY TO MEET
WITH YOU IN GENEVA ON MARCH 8.

2. WE HAVE ALSO RECEIVED JERUSALEM 656 IN WHICH YOU
RAISED QUESTION OF POSSIBLE SAUDI POLITICAL MOTIVES
FOR NOT RECEIVING YOU IN RIYADH. WHILE PRINCE SAUD
HAS NOW AGREED TO SEE YOU IN GENEVA, I SUSPECT
THAT THERE WERE SOME POLITICAL CONSIDERATIONS
WHICH CONTRIBUTED TO THE PROBLEMS WE ENCOUNTERED
IN ARRANGING YOUR APPOINTMENT.

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SECRET

PAGE 02 JIDDA 01784 071519Z

3. AS YOU KNOW, SAUDI ROYAL FAMILY HAS ACQUIRED
A REPUTATION FOR TAKING EXTENDED VACATIONS AT
INOPPORTUNE TIMES. ACCORDING TO OUR INFORMATION,
CROWN PRINCE FAHD IS OUT IN THE DESRET COMBINING
A HONEYMOON WITH HIS LATEST EITHTTEEN-YEAR OLD
PRIDE WITH POLITICAL FENCE MENDING WITH THE

TRIBAL LEADERS. HOWEVER, BOTH HE AND PRINCE SAUD
COULD HAVE RETURNED TO RIYADH IN A MATTER OF HOURS
HAD THEY WISHED TO DO SO.

4. FACT THAT THEY DID NOT DO SO MAY REFLECT A DESIRE NOT
TO MEET WITH YOU PUBLICLY IN RIYADH. THEY ARE
DEEPLY SKEPTICAL THAT USG WILL APPLY PRESSURE ON
ISRAEL TO THE EXTENT THEY DEEM ESSENTIAL TO BRING
ABOUT A SETTLEMENT. WHILE WE HAVE NOT GIVEN SAUDIS
DETAILED BRIEFINGS ON YOUR TALKS, THEY HAVE PROBABLY
HEARD ENOUGH FROM THE PRESS AND FROM OTHER SOURCES
TO CONVINCE THEM THAT YOUR TALKS WILL NOT LEAD TO
ANY SIGNIFICANT BREAKTHROUGHS. TYPICAL SAUDI RE-
ACTION TO SUCH A SITUATION IS TO ADOPT LOW PROFILE
AND PLAY DOWN ANY PUBLIC ASSOCIATION WITH WHAT THEY VIEW
AS UNSUCCESSFUL EFFORT.

5. I BELIEVE WE SHOULD ALSO KEEP IN MIND THE
INITIAL ANGRY SAUDI REACTION TO SADAT'S TRIP TO
JERUSALEM WHICH WAS CONSIDERED AS SOMETHING AKIN
TO DESECRATION BY MANY RELIGIOUSLY ORIENTED SAUDIS.
THIS ANGER WAS FINALLY CONTAINED BY COOLER HEADS
WITHIN ROYAL FAMILY WHO ARGUED FOR A WAIT-AND-
SEE ATTITUDE IN HOPE THAT SOMETHING MIGHT RESULT
FROM SADAT'S EFFORTS. ISRAELIS, HOWEVER, HAVE
NOT RESPONDED WITH ANYTHING THAT SAUDIS CONSIDER
SECRET

SECRET

PAGE 03 JIDDA 01784 071519Z

TO BE A SIGNIFICANT CONCESSION, AND SAUDIS MAY
NOW BE RETHINKING THEIR POSITION TOWARD SADAT'S
INITIATIVE. IT WOULD BE CONSISTENT WITH THEIR
TRADITIONAL PATTERN OF BEHAVIOR IF THEY WOULD
NOW EDGE AWAY, AT LEAST PUBLICLY, FROM SADAT
AND SADAT-INSPIRED PEACE EFFORTS IN THE HOPE
OF FINDING A MIDDLE GROUND MORE ACCEPTABLE TO
SYRIA AND OTHER ANTI-SADAT ARABS. THEY HAVE
PROBABLY CONCLUDED THAT THE POSITION OF THE
ANTI-SADAT ARABS WILL BE STRENGTHENED AS IT
BECOMES MORE APPARENT THAT SADAT'S EFFORTS
HAVE FAILED. THEIR APPARENT RELUCTANCE TO
RECEIVE YOU IN RIYADH AT A HIGH LEVEL COULD BE A
FIRST STEP IN THIS PROCESS OF SEEKING MORE NEUTRAL
GROUND.

6. AT SAME TIME, I BELIEVE THAT SAUDIS ARE VERY
WORRIED OVER THE TREND OF EVENTS IN THE AREA AND
WOULD STILL RESPOND VERY POSITIVELY TO ANY DEVELOP-
MENTS THAT GIVE THEM HOPE THAT A LASTING SETTLEMENT
COULD BE ACHIEVED.
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